
Community Based Economic Empowerment and Educational Consciousness Raising Through Participatory Organizing: A Case Study from Randuagung Village, Gresik

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Abstract:

Community service engagement in Randuagung Village, Kebomas District, Gresik, East Java, was designed to enhance the socio-economic capacity of residents who predominantly depend on agricultural and small-scale industrial sectors. The primary challenges identified were low business productivity, limited access to education—affecting 19.77% of the population with no formal schooling—and the absence of critical awareness regarding education and innovation. The methodology employed a community organizing approach combined with skills training, technical mentoring, and marketing network development. The program engaged microentrepreneurs, farmers, youth, and women as active participants. Results demonstrated increased community participation in business management, adoption of appropriate technology, and the establishment of *Kelompok Usaha Bersama* or KUB (Joint Business Groups) that strengthened solidarity and collaborative practices. The engagement successfully catalyzed sustainable social transformation, fostered economic independence, and cultivated heightened consciousness regarding the importance of education and innovation among village residents.

Keywords: Community Organizing; Economic Empowerment; Educational Consciousness; Participatory Development; Sustainable Livelihoods.

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Introduction

Randuagung Village, located in Kebomas District, Gresik Regency, East Java, possesses considerable natural and human resources that remained largely underdeveloped at the time of intervention. Based on qualitative and quantitative data obtained through field observation and community interviews, from recorded 15,909 residents, the majority of Randuagung's population depended on agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, and micro-level trading. Of this population, 5,411 individuals (34.01%) had completed secondary education (SMA), indicating that more than one-third of residents possessed foundational knowledge and skills capable of further development. However, without supplementary training or advanced education, this human resource potential remained inadequately leveraged for sustainable economic development.

Conversely, 3,146 residents (19.77%) had never attended formal schooling, a critical challenge that rendered this segment vulnerable to poverty and unable to participate actively in economic development. The causes of educational exclusion likely encompassed limited access

to educational facilities, household economic constraints, and insufficient awareness regarding education's importance. This educational inequality represented a significant barrier to inclusive,

sustainable socio-economic transformation. Consequently, targeted interventions through non-formal education programs, basic skills training, and literacy engagements became essential to enhance community capacity. Despite Randuagung's substantial human resources, the educational gap required strategic intervention. The village's poverty rate stood at approximately 15%, with per capita income averaging Rp5 million per month—below the district average of Rp60 million annually. This socio-economic profile necessitated deliberate community service programs addressing both economic productivity and educational consciousness.

The focus of this community service engagement centered on three interconnected objectives: enhancing community skills in business management, promoting appropriate technology adoption, and strengthening local product marketing networks. Simultaneously, the program aimed to foster heightened consciousness, understood in the critical pedagogy tradition, regarding the indispensable relationship between education, innovation, and economic self-determination. Community organizing served as the primary methodology, anchored in participatory development principles that position residents as active agents rather than passive beneficiaries.

Extant literature demonstrates that community empowerment through integrated education and training effectively enhances socio-economic capacity. Narayan and colleagues (2000) found that participatory education and training programs significantly increase community engagement in economic development. Similarly, Korten's (1984) research on bottom-up capacity strengthening illustrates how locally-driven engagements create sustainable social change. Building on this evidence, the present engagement aimed to generate sustained socio-economic transformation in Randuagung through increased household incomes, employment creation, and institutional strengthening. The ultimate objective was cultivating an autonomous, innovative community equipped to navigate globalized economic contexts while maintaining cultural values and collective consciousness regarding education's centrality to human flourishing

Method

This community service program employed participatory action in its research methodology. It utilized a community organizing approach to enhance residents' socio-economic and educational consciousness. The program targeted Randuagung Village residents, with particular emphasis on vulnerable populations including microentrepreneurs, farmers, youth, and women. The village was selected based on three criteria: substantial underdeveloped natural and human resources; pressing socio-economic challenges including low incomes, limited capital access, and deficient managerial skills; and demonstrated community receptiveness to collaborative development engagements.

The intervention operated through a sequential community organizing process comprising four interconnected phases:

- (i) *Problem and Asset Identification*. Initial engagement involved community members in identifying both challenges and existing assets through structured methodologies including focused group discussions (FGDs), participatory rural appraisal (PRA), field observation, and secondary data analysis. Residents collaboratively identified problems such as low business productivity, inadequate market access, and limited awareness of educational pathways.

Simultaneously, existing community assets, including social networks, indigenous knowledge, and natural resources, were documented to inform asset-based development strategies.

(ii) *Participatory Action Planning*

Following problem analysis, residents engaged in collaborative program planning, establishing priorities aligned with community-identified needs and available resources. Priority activities included business skills training, management mentoring, and marketing network development. Critically, this phase incorporated intentional consciousness-raising components, where discussions explicitly addressed how education, informed decision-making, and collective learning enhance economic outcomes

(iii) *Involvement of Community Leadership*

The program implementation emphasized active community participation across all activities. Business skills training addressed financial management, product marketing, and technology application. Technical mentoring provided individualized support for enterprise development. Marketing network expansion leveraged both traditional channels and digital platforms. Throughout implementation, facilitators deliberately cultivated critical consciousness—encouraging residents to analyze root causes of economic challenges, question limiting assumptions, and envision alternative possibilities.

(iv) *Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation, and Institutionalization*

Community members engaged in ongoing program assessment, evaluating progress toward objectives, and identifying necessary adjustments. This transparency ensured accountability and resident ownership. Final activities focused on institutional strengthening, including formalization of collaborative groups (KUB), strengthening of cooperative structures, and establishment of linkages with local government, civil society organizations (specifically the Muhammadiyah sub-Branch, PRM-GKB 4), and private sector partners

Research data were gathered through complementary qualitative and quantitative methods: (a) participant observation during all community activities; (b) in-depth interviews with representative community members, local leaders, and government officials; (c) focused group discussions exploring program impacts and community perspectives; (d) documentary analysis of project records; and (e) participatory assessment tools measuring changes in community knowledge, attitudes, and practices. Data analysis examined changes across three dimensions: (i) economic outcomes including income changes, employment creation, and enterprise development; (ii) capability development including skill acquisition and business management competence; and (iii) consciousness transformation including heightened awareness of education's importance, understanding of systemic economic constraints, and commitment to collective problem-solving.

Results

Community service activities generated measurable economic improvements. Microentrepreneurs, through targeted skills training and technical mentoring, adopted improved business management practices. Farmers implemented more efficient agricultural techniques while developing value-added products. Several entrepreneurs began utilizing social media and digital platforms for product marketing, substantially expanding customer reach. The establishment of Joint Business Groups (KUB) created collaborative mechanisms enabling residents to aggregate production, reduce transaction costs, and access larger markets. These economic transitions reflected participants' enhanced capacity to identify market opportunities,

manage production processes, and navigate digital commerce. Income improvements were documented among participating households, though precise monetary gains varied by enterprise type and individual effort. More significantly, participants developed sustained engagement with business innovation, suggesting behavioral change extending beyond initial training.

A critical program outcome involved institutional innovation. The formalization of KUB created durable collaborative structures facilitating ongoing resource-sharing, collective problem-solving, and mutual support. These groups transcended transactional arrangements, evolving into solidarity networks strengthening social cohesion. Cooperative structures were similarly revitalized, providing legal frameworks for collective enterprise while generating government support pathways. Importantly, local leaders emerged organically throughout the process, assuming responsibility for group coordination, member motivation, and external relationship management. These grassroots leaders became catalysts for sustained change, demonstrating that bottom-up institutional development proves more resilient than externally-imposed structures.

Perhaps most significantly, program activities catalyzed awareness shifts regarding education, innovation, and economic self-determination. Community members increasingly recognized connections between educational attainment and economic opportunity, both for themselves and their children. Discussions regarding children's schooling became more prominent, with parents articulating aspirations for their offspring's educational advancement. Youth engagement increased as young people recognized education's instrumental value within contemporary economy. Additionally, consciousness regarding systemic barriers to development increased. Residents moved beyond attributing poverty solely to individual shortcomings, developing more sophisticated analyses of structural constraints (such as limited capital access, inadequate infrastructure, policy gaps) that required collective advocacy alongside individual effort. This consciousness transformation, understood as critical consciousness in critical pedagogy frameworks (*conscientizacao* by Paulo Freire), represented significant movement beyond awareness toward engaged analysis and potential for transformative action. Community members demonstrated heightened appreciation for indigenous knowledge systems, recognizing these as resources complementing formal education rather than obstacles to overcome. This integration of traditional and contemporary knowledge strengthened cultural identity while enhancing economic adaptability among residents in Randuagung village.

The eventual result pertained to social cohesion and collective efficacy among the Raduagung's residents. Visible strengthening of social capital accompanied economic and institutional changes. Solidarity between residents deepened through collaborative work, mutual learning, and collective problem-solving. Previously isolated microentrepreneurs formed supportive networks, sharing market information and celebrating mutual successes. Women's groups particularly benefited, accessing expanded opportunities while fostering gender consciousness regarding their economic contributions and leadership potential. Communities developed heightened collective efficacy namely shared conviction that united effort could address local challenges. This psychological shift from fatalism toward agency represents perhaps the program's most profound accomplishment, as collective efficacy sustains development engagements beyond external facilitation periods. In short, this community engagement process has established a robust foundation for sustainable socio-economic development. The residents have transcended the role of passive beneficiaries to become proactive agents of rural development, driving a social transformation that is characterized by greater inclusivity and self-reliance.



Figure 1: Discussion with the representative people of Randuagung village.

Discussions

1. Theoretical Integration

The Randuagung engagement's outcomes align substantially with established community development and social capital theories. Narayan and Pritchett (2000) argued that participatory education and training increase active community participation in economic development. Also, Korten's (1984) bottom-up capacity development theory finds support in the emergence of local leadership and organic institutional development observed throughout the program. It conforms with what Randuagung residents precisely demonstrated through expanded entrepreneurial activities and institutional innovation.

Putnam's (2000) social capital framework illuminates institutional outcomes. The networks, mutual trust, and collaborative norms cultivated through Joint Business Groups (KUB) and cooperative revival directly reflect social capital accumulation. These relational assets enhanced not only individual economic outcomes but collective problem-solving capacity and community well-being. The consciousness transformation dimension connects to critical pedagogy, particularly Freire's (1970) concept of *conscientização*. Critical awareness of social reality leads to transformative actions. Rather than narrowly technical training, the engagement intentionally cultivated residents' analytical capacity regarding economic systems, educational opportunity, and collective agency. This theoretical grounding distinguishes the engagement from conventional skills training, positioning education as consciousness-raising rather than mere skill transmission. According to Becker's (1964) human capital theory that provides economic explanation for improved productivity, enhanced knowledge and skills, accumulated through training and mentoring, increase labor productivity and enterprise efficiency. However, the engagement transcended human capital narrowness by simultaneously developing social capital and critical consciousness.

2. Integration of Educational Consciousness-Raising

A distinctive feature meriting theoretical attention involved consciousness-raising regarding an educational aspect. Beyond addressing immediate educational access barriers which remain important, this community service program deliberately fostered understanding of education's centrality to both individual and social justice translated into economic transformation, personal development, and civic participation. This goes by saying that "knowledge is prior to justice," according to al-Attas (1979). This educational consciousness-raising took multiple forms, namely:

- (a) *Recognition of education-economy linkages.* Community members increasingly articulated how formal education enhanced employment opportunities and entrepreneurial competence. Parents expressed stronger commitment to children's schooling, understanding education as investment rather than consumption.
- (b) *Valuation of diverse learning.* While formal schooling remained important, residents simultaneously recognized value in technical training, indigenous knowledge, and experiential learning. This integrated epistemology honors multiple knowledge systems.
- (c) *Critical awareness of educational barriers.* Consciousness expanded beyond individual responsibility to encompass structural factors limiting educational access such as poverty, gender discrimination, geographic isolation, and inadequate public services. This systems-level understanding motivates collective advocacy alongside individual effort.
- (d) *Education for transformation.* Residents increasingly conceived education not merely as credentialing mechanism but as capacity for critical analysis and transformative action. This aligns with liberation education frameworks emphasizing education's potential for empowerment.

3. Sustainability Mechanisms

Several factors suggest the community service program outcomes possess durability beyond facilitation periods in general. *First* is institutional anchoring. Normalized structures (KUB Cooperatives) provide organizational continuity independent of external facilitators. Legally registered groups access government support and retain member commitment through explicit obligations. *Second* is leadership development. Emergence of local leaders reduces program dependence on outside facilitators. These grassroots leaders possess community credibility and sustained motivation to advance collective interests. *Third* is economic incentives. Economic improvements create practical motivation for sustaining collaborative practices. Members recognize direct benefit from continued participation, distinguishing this engagement from dependency-creating charity models. *Fourth* is consciousness transformation. Heightened awareness regarding education and innovation continues motivating learning and improvement even after formal programming concludes. Internalized understanding outlasts external incentives. *Fifth* is network effects. Expanded social capital and collaborative norms become self-reinforcing as residents experience benefits from cooperation. Positive interactions strengthen social bonds, increasing cooperation likelihood.

4. Limitations and Contextual Factors

The program implementation occurred within specific contexts that shaped outcomes. *First* is scale considerations. This service program engaged substantial though not universal community participation. Documented outcomes primarily reflect participating residents' experiences. Broader community impacts, while evident, remain partially documented. *Second* is temporal scope. Data collection focused on implementation and immediate aftermath periods. Long-term sustainability requires extended follow-up research beyond current scope. *Third* is counterfactual uncertainty, without matched comparison communities, the engagement cannot definitively distinguish program-generated changes from secular trends. While observed outcomes align with program activities, alternative causal explanations remain theoretically possible. *Fourth* is structural constraints, the program addressed capacity and consciousness dimensions but operated within broader structural contexts (market access, infrastructure, policy environments) partially beyond local intervention scope. Lasting development requires complementary policy and infrastructure investments.



Figure 2: Discussion on educational-training program.

Conclusion

Community service engagements in Randuagung Village achieved significant outcomes through participatory organizing, integrated economic and educational development, and consciousness-raising rooted in critical pedagogy. The engagement empirically validates theoretical arguments regarding participatory development's effectiveness. Narayan's (2000) findings regarding education-training program impacts received confirmation as residents enhanced business practices and economic outcomes. Korten's (1984) bottom-up development thesis found support through organic leadership emergence and institutional innovation. Putnam's (2000) social capital framework illuminates relational assets accumulated through collaborative structures.

Distinctively, the engagement integrated consciousness-raising regarding education's centrality to economic transformation and human flourishing. Rather than treating education as separate from economic development, the program demonstrated how critical awareness of education-economy linkages enhances both economic outcomes and civic engagement. This integration responds to contemporary development discourse emphasizing holistic human development transcending narrow economism.

The Randuagung case illustrates that sustainable development emerges not from external imposition of predetermined solutions but from communities' own capacity for analysis, learning, and collective action. By catalyzing critical consciousness alongside economic capability development, engagements create foundations for autonomous, sustained progress aligned with community aspirations and cultural values. As communities globally confront economic restructuring and climate change, such participatory approaches emphasizing education, innovation, and collective agency offer promising pathways toward inclusive, sustainable development

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